



Discussion Brief 1

The definition and timing of anticipatory action to tackle food crises in East Africa: do they matter?

Multiple definitions of anticipatory action involve acting before a situation can be declared a crisis, with the objective to protect livelihoods and well-being. However, increasingly, many areas in which we work in the Horn of Africa are facing chronic food security 'crisis' situations.

Multiple questions arise - can we implement anticipatory action if the food security situation is already at 'crisis' levels? Does it matter what the current food security situation is for implementing anticipatory action?

This mini dialogue sought to unpack the objectives of anticipatory action within the context of chronic food crises, discussing the potential implications of implementing anticipatory action in a crisis situation versus in a 'normal' situation.

In providing support to communities, stakeholders often adopt an Anticipatory Action (AA) approach – acting before a crisis occurs to help stem negative outcomes. While many organisations have their own definition of AA, two key elements are common to most: needs for protection (people, assets or livelihoods); and the importance of timing in terms of implementation.

However, a big question is whether and how we can implement AA if a crisis is already underway? For example, many parts of Somalia have faced crisis conditions with regards to food security since March 2020, leading some to argue it is too late to take an AA approach.

Therefore, do we need to focus on a purely humanitarian response, or can the approach comprise a combination of both?

Rather than compartmentalising, perhaps we need to look at AA as a ‘package of actions’ and consider the bigger picture; especially as it takes time to mobilise supporting measures.

Emerging lessons and action points

Priority learning and action points that emerged from this dialogue include:

First, it is getting more and more difficult to define a ‘normal time’ in most parts of the Horn of Africa. The situation keeps evolving due to the impacts of climate change and other shocks, and in such a dynamic situation, it is critical to continuously look ahead. Actors should consider adapting triggers, responses and analysis as situations evolve, requiring greater flexibility and continuous adaptation.

We should not wait for ‘normality’ to initiate plans and programs because the ever-changing landscape means there are no fixed plan. The key is to look ahead while addressing the immediate challenges. In a nutshell, plans need to be flexible and adapted in response to changing needs.

Anticipatory Action plans need to be adaptable to take into consideration and act on what is most important at that point in time. Put another way, if the situation has already reached ‘crisis’ thresholds, but is projected to further deteriorate, whether it be from increased severity of the current conditions or because of forecasted incidence of an additional type of shock, AA could be implemented in anticipation of the worsening situation.

Second, community involvement is often lacking but is needed. Greater community involvement and insights are necessary to ensure that the correct protection is being offered at the right time.

The people we aim to support should not be the last port of call. It is imperative to speak to affected communities to know when to act and what is needed. In a situation that is already at crisis levels, but projected to deteriorate, this is very important to ensure the actions we take are what communities and people need most.

Third, flexible and sufficient funding is key to implement AA in protracted food crises. In a crisis, humanitarian life-saving support is understandably prioritized by donors. However, it is also critical to address a projected worsening situation to mitigate further negative outcomes.

Lack of resources means AA plans are not executed as urgently as required or systematically staggered over the years. Every country needs an overarching risk management strategy for the different risk categories which should span DRR/anticipation, response, and recovery – and eventually, adaptation.

The plan execution requires structured funding and collaborative efforts of the actors working across them. Financing is essential in moving the thinking and the doing. In other words, increased and more flexible funding would contribute to enabling the impacts we seek.

Communities build resilience against future shocks by changing the mix of animals they keep, choosing more risk-tolerant species such as goats or camels. Photo: Drylands Learning and Capacity Building Initiative



Conclusions

In the long run the questions of 'how we do' and 'what we do' remain critical. The how questions relate to the idea of looking further down the path to anticipate, expect a crisis to unfold and know that it can be influenced by other factors. So the planning is critical and establishing collaboration around this topics.

The important point remains to plan and do the right thing at the right time, whether or not this is defined as Anticipatory Action or something else.



In January 2022 a tropical storm, causing Cyclone Ana, hit Malawi and surrounding countries. It was the second deadliest severe weather event in the area in 2022, took the lives of thousands and displaced thousands more. In the photo a young girl walks through the displacement camp she now lives in during one of the frequent sporadic rains that continue daily. Credit: Thoko Chikondi



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SAVE THE CHILDREN'S FRAMEWORK
FOR ANTICIPATORY ACTION

December 2022

More

The Save the Children 'Framework for Anticipatory Action' explains how Anticipatory Action fits within the scope of Save the Children's work, outlines key components, as well as a broad ambition for our work on Anticipatory Action. Developed in consultation with stakeholders across Save the Children, the framework is a starting point to create new and adapt existing processes to better anticipate and mitigate the impact of future crises. It aims to set forth a more fluid space and potential for improved risk management across humanitarian and development work.

<https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/jNPkGKm/>



In 2022, the Jameel Observatory for Food Security Early Action and partners convened several virtual mini dialogues on priority topics related to the Observatory vision: vulnerable pastoral and agro-pastoral communities in target regions of East Africa are more prepared for and resilient to the effects of evolving environmental shocks and stresses on their food security and nutrition. The aim was to identify priority research, learning and other actions that the Observatory and a wider community of collaborators can tackle.

The mini dialogues followed a similar process, starting with a short framing presentation, group discussion, then short plenary stocktaking. This dialogue on 29 March 2022 was championed by Laura Swift from Save the Children UK. This brief was reviewed by Laura Swift and Jo Grace of Save the Children and finalized by Nathan Jensen of the University of Edinburgh

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The Jameel Observatory for Food Security Early Action is an international partnership led by the University of Edinburgh collaborating with the International Livestock Research Institute (ILRI), Save the Children, the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) and Community Jameel.

Based at ILRI in Nairobi, Kenya, we combine the local knowledge and concerns of communities facing on-the-ground threats of hunger with innovations in data science and humanitarian action; teaming up to devise solutions that can predict, prepare for, and overcome climate-related food security and malnutrition challenges in dryland areas.
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